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THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

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Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

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QUESTION IX.

What is meant by "He who has mastered vibration, alone understands."?
(In Tea-Table Talk, Path for Oct., 1887.)

Ans.—This is to ask the FORUM to interpret an interpretation. The question should really be put to "Julius". It may, however, be said that all force, as shown by Herbert Spencer, moves rhythmically, not in a straight and even line, but with undulations. The width of these waves and the number of them determine the nature of sound and color. The human ear and eye are incompetent to perceive sound and color beyond a very limited range. Two-thirds of the light around are imperceptible to us. But as the higher training recognized in Theosophy proceeds, and as the being is more and more emancipated from dependence upon purely sensuous perception, the range of its power continually widens. It may very well be, then, that advanced Chelas, still more Adepts, are cognizant of sights and sounds never coming within our reach. And this would result in not only a vastly greater compass of fact, but in less liability to misconception of the facts compassed, since the larger knowledge which increases the field increases also the perception of its contents.

Similarly as to the Astral World. Its forces are probably also undulatory, and specific training is needed to perceive them largely or interpret them truly. Facts and laws there, like facts and laws everywhere else, have to be studied and mastered before certainty of under-

standing is reached. This is why visions, even when real so far as they go, and not merely fancies or hallucinations or maladies, have so little profit to the subject of them. Not having had the training to inspect them, he sees them as he hears sentences in an unknown tongue,—strange, perhaps weird, things, but meaningless. To an Adept, as to a linguist, all is clear. The Astral World is to him as distinct as our terrestrial world to us, yet far more rich and intelligible. Vibration, the rhythmical movement of force, is one of the matters he thoroughly understands. He is, in fact, a scientist in those higher realms, at home there as our physicists are in matter. Unable, as we necessarily are, to expound those realms, we can yet form some faint idea of the difference between them and this, and of the lines of study by which he has mounted to them.

QUESTION X.

Is the ascetic life obligatory or essential for all men?

H. K.—Most certainly not. In the *Bhagavat-Gita* it is very distinctly explained that the essential thing is to do our duty in our own place, that is, the duty nearest us; and the man or woman who forsakes his or her own sphere in order to follow the purely contemplative life is like a soldier who seeks promotion by keeping out of the fight. Such a man gives up the duty that lies before him, in the hope of personal advancement, which is directly contrary to the spirit of theosophic teaching. He who is truly devoted will think only of the welfare of mankind and how he can best serve them, and therefore it is said that he who loses his life shall find it. To lose all thought of the result of our actions, in so far as that result concerns ourselves, is to be so absorbed in the thought of others that we find eternal life in our work for humanity. The true ideal life is that described in the *Bhagavat-Gita*, chaps. 4 and 5, that of him who fulfils every duty without thought of the consequences, and who is undisturbed by the fluctuations of circumstance. It is, declares that great authority, to do all things in moderation, and an excess in asceticism is as harmful to true progress as the reverse. This is because that excess can only spring from an inordinate desire for personal purification and advancement. No man ever fasted and mortified the flesh that his brother might be the better for the practice; it was his own soul that he was seeking to save. All inordinate desires are likely to injure others, and should therefore be crushed out, and absolute self-control should be practiced. To keep the soul "like the flame of a lamp burning in a windless place" is far more difficult in the close relations of family life than in the solitude of a cloister, but the harder the struggle, the greater the victory, the more glorious the conquest. The friction of daily life, the thousand petty trials of ordinary existence, are infinitely harder to

bear with absolute equanimity than the occasional great crosses that seem to arouse a latent strength that enables us to support them. To live in the world without being of the world is the most difficult of tasks; and if he who ruleth himself is greater than he who taketh a city, certainly the greatest of all is he who fights for his fellows *among* his fellows, and not he who, safely secluded on some mountain-top of solitude, watches the turmoil of battle from afar, and thanks God that he is leading a purer life than those below him. In the *Light of Asia* how beautifully the story is told of the poor woman who confesses to Buddha her unworthiness, inasmuch as she has only lived her humble life from day to day, doing what she could for others, but having no time to think of her own soul, and whom the Lord Buddha declares to have lived the perfect life and to be worthy to teach the saints themselves! The touchstone remains always the same, forgetfulness of self in the desire to help others,—in comparison with this, of what value is special diet, or an especial mode of living and dressing? These things are seldom to be secured without more or less trouble to others, and if a vegetarian diet can only be had by much thought and painstaking on your own part, and possible annoyance to others, it is surely better to eat flesh in moderation than to occupy much time with the subject. There are comparatively few people who realise what it is to eat simply to satisfy the cravings of hunger, only enough to keep the bodily machine in good working order. For this purpose a certain variety is needed, but very much less food and less variety are necessary than we ordinarily use. There is every opportunity for the exercise of self-control as regards eating and drinking at our ordinary meals, without posing as ascetics. We are living here on the material plane, and while it is quite true that, regarded in the light of the eternal verities, our life and our world are illusions, it is equally true that from our present point of view they are substantial realities, and must be treated as such. It is a case of rendering unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. Let your asceticism be that self-denial which conduces to the good of others, let it begin in the subjection of all inordinate *desires*, which means not to abstain merely from self-indulgence, but to free one's self from that which prompts the self-indulgence. It is the desire of possession which inspires the strife of the world; be ye therefore *first* pure, and then peaceable, that is, to the heart free from desire *must* come peace.

Ans.—Truth has many sides, and it is a legitimate inquiry whether asceticism is ever either philosophical or desirable. One may investigate it both *a priori* and *a posteriori*. *A priori*, is it likely that a mode of life which is unnatural, forced, violative of the conditions and needs of human existence, intent on combating the innocuous rather than the baleful desires of the body, chilling the sympathetic instincts and emphasizing

the Self, destructive of sweetness and light and joy, treating Nature as an enemy, thrusting away happiness and hailing discomfort, can be healthful, invigorating, or uplifting? Very often it has been based upon a jaundiced opinion of the Supreme Being,—an opinion which holds Him hostile to His children and their happiness, delighting in gloom and wretchedness, offended by smiles and pleased at tears. "The Calvinist's God," said Theodore Parker, "is my Devil." When not so produced, it comes from a conception that matter is evil and everything tangible a debasement of creative wisdom,—the old Manichean notion, which has so strong an affinity for certain classes of minds, and which, paradoxically enough, coexists sometimes with the belief that spirit and substance are one, different "aspects" of a primal unity, and that evolution is from lower to higher planes. However originating, it goes forward on the assumption that the true human life is something very different from what the Higher Powers have, in fact, been pleased to make it, and that the aspirant after Their wisdom is to begin by denying that They showed any wisdom at all in the construction of the very sphere in which They have placed him, and by reversing, so far as unavoidable difficulties permit, the parts of the very scheme They have framed! *A priori*, then, the ascetic idea seems to have a mistaken basis, a misguided method, and an erroneous aim.

A posteriori, we find in history abounding evidence of the results. The inevitable effect of starvation and solitude is brilliantly stated by the impartial Lecky, and any one supposing that the path to larger mentality and deeper devotion lies through a desert or a cave—literal or metaphorical—has only to read the "History of Morals." The story of the monks of Syria and the Thebaid is the answer for all time to the question of asceticism. It is true that in their case a monstrous creed was united to a ferocious partisanship, but why should there have been either such a creed or such a partisanship if the ascetic life conduces to sweetness and light?

There are excellent reasons why asceticism is unphilosophical. Of those not already touched upon, one of the most potent is this,—It concentrates attention on the very thing which is adjudged unworthy of any. If a man considers his body a belittling and degrading adjunct to him, and endeavors to repress and suppress it by continual care to give it only such food, such surroundings, and such discomforts as will do so, the thought of the body is as truly ever-present and guiding as in the case of a *gourmet* or a sensualist. The ascetic and the materialist have reverse objects but an identical method,—*habitual emphasis on the body.* Still another reason is, that there is no more merit or sense in depriving the stomach of the food it needs than in depriving the lungs of the air they need. Semi-asphyxiation stands on the same level as semi-starvation. Still another reason is, that inadequate or perverted nutrition

affects the mind, the judgment, the discriminating faculty, the whole interior outfit, for there can be a *sana mens* only in a *sano corpore.*

If all mechanical and materialistic schemes to aid spiritual illumination are both irrational and subversive, may there not be, in view of the undoubted need to rise above the flesh, some moderate, judicious course open to an aspirant? Given a desire to become indifferent to the body, the desire will not be met by forever thinking of the body. Yet it may be met by withdrawing causes prompting to thought. Suppose, then, a diet sufficiently copious, varied, and palatable to avoid hunger, wearisomeness, or disgust, and yet not so luxurious as to draw attention to its quality, are not those causes reduced to their lowest limit? The palate and the stomach are not excited in such a way as to bring the body in view of the mind. Similarly as to clothing and amusements. The *juste milieu* avoids both extremes, either of which is certain to arouse thought and care. The policy is that in feeding infants: hunger or surfeit will make an infant cry; give it moderate food and it will be quiet.

Theosophy combats materialism, and therefore can hardly favor materialistic notions. Yet nothing is more strongly materialistic than the notion that spiritual progress is conditioned on physical acts. If hunger and thirst and bad air and discomfort are the passports to the Divine Vision, we are surely taking a low view of the highest and a high view of the lowest. From this to the conception that dirt is a prerequisite to saintliness is but a step,—a step taken fully in mediæval times, now several hundred years out of date. Theosophy is not a reproduction of the 15th century. No such reproduction could be successful or even desirable.

Nor is asceticism endorsed by an Adept revered alike by Theosophists and Christians. St. Paul, who wrote that he "kept under his body and brought it into subjection," wrote also—by no means approvingly—of those "forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats."

It would seem, then, that subordination of the flesh is not to be attained by dwelling upon it, or by teasing and annoying practices, or by unnatural modes of life, or by despising climatic and other requirements, or by any defiance of Nature and human needs.

But it is also to be remembered, as was stated at the outset, that this is but one aspect of the whole topic, and that no one aspect can claim to be exhaustive.

QUESTION XI.

How can a "Black Magician" be known? How should he be treated,—as a part of the Universal Brotherhood?

William Q. Judge.—This question comes from America. It is premature, and very much in the nature of "crossing a bridge before you

reach it." It also seems to indicate either a loose use of the term "black magician" or a total ignorance of what such a being is, as well as a forgetfulness of what has often been stated,—that a black magician is the efflorescence of an age.

Such a being as this is one who has acquired knowledge of recondite laws of nature such as those known to the White Adepts, and who uses that knowledge for purely selfish purposes. He is the triumph of selfishness, not in that degree which we so easily recognize about us every day in the lives of men of strong will used for selfish ends, but in a degree and to an extent that raise the black adept to a pinnacle of knowledge and power far above the pigmies of this century. He can perform marvels, read thoughts, and do all the wonderful feats usually attributed alone to White Magicians.

How many of such, then, are there to be found now, either among those who study occultism, or in the ranks of the money-loving or fame-pursuing multitude? I have never heard of one. Why, then, need to enquire how one should treat a black magician? If the questioner shall ever be so unfortunate as to meet one of those as yet fabled monsters, he will quite likely have opportunity to reflect that the magician knew more than he did.

It is wiser to turn aside from the aspect of the matter brought up by the question, to the reflection that we all have within us potential black magicians lying in the lower and stronger part of our nature, and that it is important to see that we shall not furnish the opportunity for that potentiality to manifest itself in future lives through the giving way now to selfishness in any of its forms. The black magician, therefore, we are really concerned with is in ourselves. This talk of meeting or dealing with black magicians in the flesh, with powers developed, is purest nonsense.

But it will probably be said, "If there are White Adepts now working in the world, why are there not black ones as well?" The answer is easy. It is this. Although the full-fledged White and Black Adepts are both the efflorescence of an age, there is a great difference between them. There is as great disparity between them as between day and night, for those who follow the White Law represent spirit, unity, love, while the others represent nothing but self and disruption. Hence, although the Black Magician—in those days when they shall be abroad on the earth—may prolong his life for an enormous period, he is surely silently attacked by nature herself, and at last, when the great day of dissolution, the end of a period of manifestation, arrives, all those black ones left will be swallowed up and annihilated. But at that day all the White Adepts, those called by the Hindus "Jivanmukhta," although absorbed into Brahma are still in possession of consciousness, and will come out at the new day just as powerful as when the night came on.

Hence, as the day of Brahma is divided into the four Ages—of which Kali Yuga is the last, the White Adepts alone are known or in existence in the ages preceding Kali Yuga, and in that age the Karma fitted to bring forth Black Adepts begins to act, and the seeds sown long ago sprout up more and more as the years of Kali Yuga roll on. Now as that dark age has 432,000 years, and only 5,000 of those have passed by, there has not yet been time to evolve the real black magician. But this civilization preeminently shows the seeds as sprouting, and nowhere with greater power than in America. Here the national characteristic is individualism, and that existing as a tendency of the nature will differentiate some day into individualism concentrated into some few men. Imagine this concentration as occurring in a future century when wonderful advances will have been made in knowledge of great forces of nature, and you can easily see without any need of prescience the future black magician.

Ans.—The mode of detecting a Black Magician would seem to be the same as that to detect a White Magician,—an ascertainment of his powers and of the purposes for which he uses them. The first thing in the case of any supposed Magician would be to assure oneself that he truly possessed magical powers. This may appear very easy, but is really of great difficulty. Waiving the facts that any strange, marvellous phenomenon strikes an ordinary observer as supernatural, and that nothing is more erroneous than the judgment of untrained persons on such, there is the further fact that only "test conditions" provide guarantee against imposture or mistake. But, given these, what degree and number of powers are needful to demonstrate magical attainments? Supposing them to be determined, there is still the question of motive, and this is by no means simple or uncomplicated. Evidently, then, the certain detection of a Black Magician is not a matter to be easily stated in a prescription.

It may not be out of place here to refer to the security Theosophists enjoy in the ample, thorough, conclusive evidence afforded of the existence of White Magic in the Revered Initiate whom it is their privilege to still possess as one of the Founders of the Theosophical Society and the channel for Masters' teachings. Here we are enabled to inspect both power and motive. Apart from instances copiously detailed in *The Occult World*, there are others known to associates of Madame Blavatsky which have been at fitting times repeated to those interested. Perhaps there is no one more striking than the production by her to the General Secretary of a slip of paper, bearing a memorandum unsigned, unaddressed, giving no clue whatever to the owner or meaning, a slip lost 3 years before and 3,000 miles away, the possession and the loss of which had never been mentioned by him to any one whatever, and which was

suddenly and without even a hint handed to him by his hostess. Here every test condition was present, and all possibility of other than magical knowledge and power utterly wanting.

The evidence of magic given by many such cases is ample. Then, again, as to motive. Black Magic is for self-interest. No case of magic for self-interest has ever been produced against Madame Blavatsky. The earlier use of it was to verify the claim to expressing Masters' existence and instructions. The later and rarer use was for equally altruistic purposes,—good to others in heart or mind, never for self in any shape. Black magic is employed to gain wealth, ease, luxury, power, authority, self-interest in some form. In the person we are considering, wealth, ease, and luxury have been deliberately abandoned, and the only influence desired is on behalf of Truth through its intelligent manifestation and reception. A life more void of self-seeking or more self-abnegatory, it is hard to picture.

Now to form a conception of a Black Magician, all this must be reversed. We must imagine a constant succession of phenomena as public and ostentatious as possible, a life of incessant effort after influence or luxury, an obtrusion of the personality and an ignoring of altruism, an omission of teaching functions and a disregard of rights. Such a combination of power and motive would justify a suspicion of Black Magic.

How far the use of Black Magic would work a forfeiture of place in the Universal Brotherhood one can hardly say. But it matters not, as neither the determination of the question nor the enforcement of the penalty is, or can be, committed to any of us. It is a purely speculative problem. Theosophy rather discourages waste of strength on questions which throw no light on matters of doctrine or duty, merely exercise curiosity or ingenuity, and give an unpractical character to Divine Science and to the student. It is hardly worth while to puzzle oneself over remote and never-to-be-encountered problems, when every atom of energy is needed for the double work of assisting the spread of Truth and ensuring its vitality in one's life.

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